

Message Text

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14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L WARSAW 3854

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PL

SUBJECT: JEWISH CEMETERIES IN POLAND

REF: MEMCON OF JULY 11, 1973, WITH DAVID BLUMBERG
AND HERMAN EDELSBERG

1. SUMMARY: REPRESENTING THE AGUDAS ISREAL WORLD
FEDERATION, PROFESSOR ISAAC LEWIN OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY
IN NEW YORK HAS PROPOSED TO THE POLISH GOVERNMENT THAT
JEWISH CEMETERIES IN POLAND BE MAINTAINED AS "HISTORICAL
MONUMENTS" WITH PART OF THE COST BEING BORNE BY THE
INTERNATIONAL JEWISH COMMUNITY. HE REPORTS THAT THE
INITIAL POLISH REACTION TO THIS PROPOSAL WAS FAVORABLE.
HOWEVER, PORFESSOR LEWIN IS DISTURBED BY EVIDENCE THAT
A ROAD WILL SOON BE BUILT ACROSS PART OF WARSAW'S
JEWISH CEMETERY AND PREDICTS STRONG PROTESTS FOR US
JEWRY SHOULD THIS OCCUR. END SUMMARY.

2. PROFESSOR ISAAC LEWIN OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY IN NEW
YORK CALLED ON ME AUGUST 1 TO REPORT ON THE OUTCOME OF
HIS VISIT HERE TO DISCUSS WITH POLISH OFFICIALS (ATTHEIR
INVITATION) THE SITUATION OF JEWISH CEMETERIES
IN POLAND. HE SAID HE HAD VISITED CEMETERIES IN
VARIOUS POLISH CITIES(FINDING THEIR CONDITION, ON THE
WHOLE, "FAIR") AND THEN HAD SPOKEN WITH DIRECTOR
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OF THE GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS,

ALEKSANDR SKARZYNSKI. HE REPEATED TO SKARZYNSKI A PROPOSAL REGARDING THE CEMETERIES WHICH HE SAID HE HAS EARLIER PUT TO THE POLES THROUGH THE POLISH EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON. UNDER THE TERMS OF THIS PROPOSAL, THE POLISH GOVERNMENT WOULD DESIGNATE THE JEWISH CEMETERIES HERE "HISTORICAL MONUMENTS," AND INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF RABBIS WOULD BE ESTABLISHED TO PASS ON ALL PROPOSALS FOR ALTERATION TO CEMETERIES, AND FINANCIAL HELP FOR RENEWING AND MAINTAINING THE CEMETERIES WOULD BE PROVIDED BY THE THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ABROAD.

3. ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR LEWIN, SKARZYNSKI SAID HE THOUGHT THE PROPOSAL A GOOD ONE BUT THAT THE APPROVAL OF THE MINISTRIES OF CULTURE AND REGIONAL ECONOMY WOULD BE NECESSARY BEFORE A FINAL DECISION COULD BE MADE. SINCE MANY OFFICIALS ARE CURRENTLY ON VACATION, PROFESSOR LEWIN DID NOT EXPECT FINAL WORD UNTIL SEPTEMBER AT THE EARLIEST, BUT HE WAS HOPEFUL THAT THE PROPOSAL WOULD BE ACCEPTED.

4. AFTER HIS TALK WITH SKARZYNSKI, LEWIN VISITED THE WARSAW JEWISH CEMETERY AND FOUND THAT PRELIMINARY WORK HAS BEGUN ON A ROAD-WIDENING PROJECT WHICH WILL NECESSITATE THE RELOCATION OF APPRIMIMATELY 5,000 GRAVES. HE SAW GRAVE STONE BEING NUMBERED, REGISTERED , AND PHOTOGRAPHED, AND WAS TOLD THAT CONSTRUCTION WORK WILL BEGIN IN ABOUT THREE MONTHS. (THE FORMER HEAD OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN POLAND, FRENKIEL, WHO HAS NOW LEFT THE COUNTRY, TOLD US SEVERAL WEEKS AGO THAT THE ROAD PROJECT WAS INEVITABLE, BUT DID NOT INDICATE THAT PRELIMINARY WORK AHD ALREADY BEGUN. LEWIN HEARD THAT FREKIEL HAD ALLEGEDLY GIVEN PERMIS- SION FOR THE PROJECT TO BEGIN WITHOUT CONSULTING HIS CONSTITUENTS, THEREBY PROVIDING POLISH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WITH THE FORMAL JUSTIFICATION THAT THE PROJECT HAD BEEN APPROVED BY THE POLISH JEWISH COMMUNITY.)

5. DR. LEWIN WAS VERY DISTURBED AT THE PROSPECT OF ROAD CONSTRUCTION. HE SAID THAT, SINCE THERE ARE NO RABBIS IN POLAND, PROPER PROCEDURE MIGHT NOT BE OBSERVED IN RELOCATING THE GRAVES. MOREOVER, THE PROJECT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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NOT WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF HIS PROPOSAL ABOUT MAINTENANCE OF THE CEMETERIES. HE PREDICTED THAT THE PROJECT WOULD CAUSE A STORM OF PROTEST FROM THE US JEWISH COMMUNITY AND SAID HE PLANNED TO REGISTER HIS OPPOSITION BY TELEPHONE TO SKARZYNSKI'S OFFICE (ALTHOUGH BOTH SKARZYNSKI AND HIS DEPUTY ARE NOW ON LEAVE) AND LATER BY LETTER WHEN HE RETURNS TO THE US. HE ASKED THAT I ALSO EXPRESS MY CONCERN TO POLISH OFFICIALS.

6. COMMENT: IF THE DEPARTMENT PRECEIVES NO OBJECTION,
I PLAN TO MENTION THIS ISSUE INFORMALLY TO VICE
MINISTER SPASOWSKI WHEN HE RETURNS FROM VACATION LATER
THIS MONTH, INFORMING HIM OF DR. LEWIN'S CONCERN AND
POINTING OUT THAT THE ROAD PROJECT COULD ENDANGER THE
IMPROVEMENT IN US JEWISH ATTITUDES TOWARD POLAND WHICH
IS AVOWEDLY THE OBJECTIVE MOTIVATING THE INVITATIONS
EXTENDED BY THE POLISH GOVERNMENT TO DR. LEWIN AND
MESSRS. EDELSBERG AND BLUMBERG OF B'NAI B'RITH.
DAVIES

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